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Christian Work in the island of Cuba.—

Confidential

In the year 1870 the Bishop of Minnesota accidentally visited the island of Cuba.— He was on his way to Hayti— his finding that he could not go thither without much inconvenience and trouble he abandoned the chief purpose of his travel and determined to look over Cuba.— He found the island in the worst state of Mediaevalism he had ever seen— and moreover English— German and American citizens living in its midst— without moral or religious discipline of any kind— and looked upon by the Roman Christians as free thinkers and Jews— there was no one to care for the sick nor no one to bury the dead— in fact our dead had to be buried in the open Country outside of the cemeteries or else thrown into the sea.— He found a state of things existing amongst all classes of society— which finds not a parallel in the whole of Mediaeval history— He determined to remedy it if possible. So in his return to the United States and at the Meeting of the "General Convention"— during the Autumn of 1871— he laid the subject before the House of Bishops— and suggested that steps should be taken at once to [illegible]

could be done - but Notwithstanding this trouble and this many discouragements - we were able by God's help to commence the Church's work which has increased in interest and Numbers Ever since. — We at first organized Chapel Services in the harbor of Havana and Sunday after Sunday our chapel was crowded with Worshippers and at times we had as many as fifty and Sixty to partake of the Holy Communion. During May of 1872 I moved our Services to Shore first to the rooms of the United States Consul General and afterwards to a large and handsome Saloon which we are now using as a chapel. In this we have had to encounter and overcome many obstacles. Although the New Constitution of Spain allows freedom of Worship and although this law was promulgated in the Governments official organ in October 1869 - yet it is a notorious fact that any laws which may be objectionable to the Authorities of the Islands are set aside and no efforts are made to carry them into effect - I am able only to hint at these obstacles in a brief statement like this - I wish it to be more a statement of work accomplished than of Difficulties encountered - I will now simply say that

During the last Summer 1300 visits have been made to the sick and our dead have been decently buried- I have had a Chapel fitted up in the Institution and during the last Summer our burial office has been read in it as many as five times a day- heretofore our dead have been buried without Coffins in the rudest manner- In addition to this work I have established the Church services at the City of Matanzas about 62 miles distant from Havana- and during the last year have gone there every Sunday afternoon in order to hold a Night Service for our people and preach to them. Hundreds of people in this island are living in a State of Concubinage- and I am sorry to say- many English and Americans- This is caused principally by the high rates charged for performing the marriage office- I have been endeavoring to provide some remedy for it during the last year- and have furthermore offered to marry any and all parties who may be living in such sin- for nothing.- Such in brief is some of our work- and these are our needs- I need in the first place two resident and Godly men to help me- one to act as Chaplain to our hospital- who will live in the Institution and help me in the Havana Church work- this

When we take into Consideration the great importance and Magnitude of the work - and moreover when we consider that we as a Church - and as a Christian people are responsible for this state of things in Cuba - 1st as a Church because we have allowed our people to remain as "Sheep without a Shepherd" - 2nd as a Christian people because we support it in a measure by spending our means to the amount of 60,000,000 Dollars annually in the purchase of what this island has to offer us in the shape of Sugar and tobacco. — I have endeavored to make this a full statement of our work and at the same time a brief one. — I trust that in the hands of those whom the Bishops have selected to help me - it may not fail to bring us what we need. —

Edward K. Russell